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14 April 1960

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MEMORANDUM FOR:

Chief, Geographic Research
Office of Research and Reports

SUBJECT : The Kurds in 1959, CIA/RR GR L-60-2

1. Thanks for the report on the Kurds. A number of us have read it with some interest. In the way of a substantive comment let me reproduce here the text of a memo to me from our Middle East people who are concerned with these matters.

"a. "I" can't quarrel with most of the factual data (Sections I-III) of this job, though labeling it a "Geographic Report" seems stretching the meaning of that term pretty far.

b. "The last section, essentially one of political analysis and prognostication, is a different story. Some of it looks OK, more of it looks wrong or at least misleading -- especially the final estimate on prospects for Kurdish independence or autonomy. In a word, it assigns considerably more likelihood to such a development than I think it should; predicates the eventuality on a misleading list of factors; and distorts the present and probable Soviet role in the situation.

c. "The best way to contrast ONE staff views with those of ORR is to compare page 25 of this report (Prospects for Autonomy") with our memorandum of a year ago (Memorandum for the Director, "The Kurdish Problem", 8 April 1959.) The ONE memo represented a rough consensus of opinion on the Kurdish problem gleaned from a meeting of intelligence community specialists. Its principal points, which still seem valid to us, were:

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* [REDACTED] Chief, NE Staff

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DOCUMENT NO. 4
NO CHANGE IN CLASS. ☐
DECLASSIFIED
CLASS. CHANGED TO: TS S 01485
NEXT REVIEW DATE:
AUTH: NR 70-2
DATE 9-12-78 REVIEWER: 372044

(1). "There is little likelihood of the establishment of an independent Kurdistan. Divisive forces and political indifference outweigh such cohesive factors as exist, and the cause of Kurdish separatism will probably be further weakened as time goes on by detribalization, settlement and related social processes.

(2). "Nevertheless, the Kurds will continue to have considerable nuisance value as potential rebels for some years to come, notably in Iran and Iraq, if given outside stimulus and aid.

(3). "The USSR has played the Kurdish angle in a low key, and while building assets among Kurds, it probably views them primarily as a potential means of harassing Iran rather than the raw material of a new pro-Soviet state at any early date. The Soviets are not likely to exploit the Kurds in a manner inconsistent with efforts to develop Soviet influence and/or control of Iraq."

2. The meeting referred to above was sparked by a concern, notably on the part of the Director, lest something adverse to Western interests might be being hatched in Kurd territory. Present were what we believed to be all of the Kurdish experts from the USIB agencies. The conclusions were not coordinated but were simply cast as the sense of the meeting and transmitted to the Director as such. We hoped that they would extinguish a brush fire which I sincerely hope CIA/RR GR L-60-2 has not relit.

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SHERMAN KENT
Assistant Director
National Estimates

P. S. I attach a thermofax copy of our memo of last year.

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cc: Mr. [REDACTED]

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